



Ancient Monuments of the
**ISLES OF
SCILLY**

Ministry of Works Official Guide-book

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Oliver Hudson

MINISTRY OF WORKS
ANCIENT MONUMENTS AND HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Ancient Monuments of the
Isles of Scilly

BY THE LATE
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Introduction

EIGHT ancient monuments in the Scilly Isles have been placed in the guardianship of the Ministry of Works by the Duchy of Cornwall, those on Tresco with the agreement of the late Major A. A. Dorrien-Smith, D.S.O., who, like his forebears, was always zealous in preserving the antiquities of the islands. Four of them are prehistoric, viz., the Burial Chambers of Innisidgen, Lower Innisidgen, Porth Hellick Down and Bants Carn with the ancient village adjacent to the last, all on St. Mary's; the other four belong to the 16th or 17th century A.D., viz., Harry's Walls on St. Mary's, and King Charles Castle, Cromwell's Castle and the Old Blockhouse on Tresco. In order that these ancient monuments may be understood in their true relationship to one another and to the very many other ancient monuments in Scilly, this guide-book has been written in connected form as the archaeology and history of the whole of the islands.

Detailed descriptions of seven monuments are embodied in the text, and the folding map shows the method of approach to them.

The Stone Age and Before

The Scilly Isles, which on a clear day are within sight of Land's End in Cornwall, are composed entirely of granite and blown sand. The proximity of the mainland and certain clear pieces of evidence that the land of the islands has sunk, and is still sinking, have led to the belief that Scilly was once part of Cornwall, and that the intervening sea now covers the site of the lost land of Lyonesse. This belief has become a legend, enshrined in the story of Arthur in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. Apart, however, from the fact that a certain Roman writer refers to an island, which is probably Scilly, a century or so before the supposed time of Arthur, there are geological reasons for stating categorically that Scilly cannot have been part of the mainland of Britain since man appeared on the earth.

On the other hand, a geological feature of an exactly opposite kind has had a profound effect upon man's progress in the islands. In certain places along the northern edges of the northern islands, particularly on Chapel Down, St. Martin's, quite large pebbles of flint and greensand chert are to be found. They are the sole remnants of a deposit laid down on the bed of a sea in the Tertiary Period many thousands of years before the appearance of human beings. A similar,

but much larger, deposit of natural flint on Haldon Hill, in Devon, was of great importance in prehistoric times for so long as men used flint in the making of implements. There is little doubt that the flints of St. Martin's and other islands in Scilly attracted settlers to the islands at an early date, because flints of sufficient size for the fashioning of anything bigger than an arrowhead are of rare occurrence in the west of Britain. Thus early in man's history were the Scillies the Fortunate Isles. Not only were they a convenient anchorage for adventurous mariners, but here could be found raw material, which was in great demand for use and trade.

How soon this circumstance became known to men it may never be possible to say. The earliest relics found in the islands are three stone axes, two from Gugh and one from St. Mary's, which may have been made in the Neolithic period (3rd millennium B.C.), but may well have continued in use for a long time. They do not prove that men lived in Scilly before 2000 B.C., and so far neither tomb nor house in the islands has been shown to belong to so remote a period. Nevertheless, one should not be dogmatic on the point. There has undoubtedly been a great subsidence of the land since that time, and all traces of the earliest inhabitants of the islands may have vanished beneath the sea.

Geologists have noticed on the adjacent coasts of South Wales and Cornwall evidence for a subsidence of the land surface of as much as 40 feet since Neolithic times. When Barry Docks were made a stone axe of this period was found 40 feet below the present level of the sea, and there is similar evidence from Cornwall. Now the waters between the Scilly Isles are mostly very shallow; hence the shape of R.M.S. *Scillonian*, as many visitors will be painfully aware. If a line were drawn along the 25-foot marine contour, and all the land within that line were raised above the water, the land area of the islands would be doubled; but a greater elevation than this would add but little more land. These observations, viewed together, suggest that 4000 years ago the Scilly Isles were about double their modern size, with most of the present inhabited islands forming part of one land mass. The marine contour at 5 fathoms has been shown on the map in this guide-book.

For some reason at present imperfectly understood, land subsidence then began. It seems natural to expect fluctuations in its progress, and there seems to have been a time when a gigantic sand dune stretched north to south from just east of Middle Town, St. Martin's, to Bar Point, St. Mary's. Crow Bar, which is still being eroded after about 4000 years, is regarded as part of this dune. It is dry at certain tides and has been looked upon as the remains of an old causeway between St. Mary's and St. Martin's. There is no evidence for this; it is plainly

a natural feature. The product of the erosion of this large early sand dune is the later dunes, lying east and west, which border the south coast of St. Martin's, the north coast of St. Mary's and the southern point of Tresco. This process is going on apace. Erosion, coupled with subsidence of the land, is incessant, but just as much is deposited again elsewhere as is taken away, and the latest estimate is that the area of land in Scilly is slowly increasing. When one adds the fact that the sand deposited becomes in due course ideal for the island's leading industry, the raising of early flowers, one realizes that even the destruction of the land in Scilly is a blessing in disguise.

The Bronze Age

Scilly is famous for the great number of burial mounds of the Bronze Age which are still to be seen on the islands. All are round, and all but a very few are small; the usual diameter is about 30 feet, but some are even smaller. Barrows of a larger diameter, up to 60 feet, occur, but there are only about half a dozen examples. The barrows of Scilly are composed of stones and earth, although some have merely a capping of stones, and it is probable that those in the more rocky parts of the islands were originally made entirely of stones, and should properly be called cairns. It may be noted here that the word 'Carn', which elsewhere frequently denotes a cairn or burial mound of stones, is used in Scilly to name a natural outcrop of rock.

A high proportion of the burial mounds of Scilly contain burial chambers, i.e. family or communal vaults, which could, and frequently still can, be entered at ground level from outside the mound. No less than 45 of these were recognized in the islands in 1932 or were then known to have been in existence, whereas in the whole of Cornwall there are only 17. On St. Mary's at the present time there are 16 of them out of a total of 30 barrows. The small island of Gugh has 7, as well as 21 other barrows, whilst adjacent Agnes has 28 more barrows, but none of them with chambers. Samson has 11 burial chambers as well as 8 other barrows, and Tresco has 6 burial chambers besides 22 other barrows, most of which are small and very low in height.

This great accumulation of tombs in the Scilly Isles has induced some to suggest that in certain cases inhabitants of the mainland were conveyed after death by sea to the islands for burial. Classical writers have been quoted as referring to isles of the dead, that is islands which were not normally inhabited, but which were mysteriously visited after a death. There is, however, no reason for resorting to such an unusual explanation. The islands were certainly inhabited during the

Bronze Age, since traces of dwellings of that time have recently been found. The position of these dwellings, close to the water's edge, suggests that many more such habitations have been engulfed by the sea. Moreover, Scilly has not been subject to such intensive arable farming as have many parts of the adjacent mainland, and the areas where the tombs occur, i.e. the rocky edges and most barren parts of the islands, are probably in much the same condition now as they have been for a thousand years or more. Then, also, it is clear from Dr. Borlase's experience in the eighteenth century that the islanders paid due regard to their forebears' tombs, and thus are less likely than their fellows elsewhere to have removed them. Finally, there is the fact, recently adduced from archaeological research, that the tombs are not all contemporary. Instead of being the product of but a few hundred years early in the second millennium B.C., it now seems that they were not only used but in certain cases even built as much as five hundred years after the time usually attributed to such tombs.

Although in Scilly none of these early tombs is of so massive a character, with very large stones and high chamber, as are many megalithic monuments, such as Trethevy Quoit in east Cornwall, many of them are built in the tradition of the megalithic culture, which was common to all the western parts of Britain. The four Burial Chambers, which are in the Ministry's guardianship, all have walls composed principally of large upright stones, and all have massive cap-stones. There is now no means of finding out even approximately when these tombs were built, since they have long ago been rifled of their contents, but comparison of their style of construction with that of tombs elsewhere suggests that it was during the Early Bronze Age (1900-1500 B.C.). A few pieces of pottery found in two of them may be of later date, but it should always be remembered that these tombs certainly remained in use for centuries, and the potsherds in question may not have accompanied the earliest burials in the tomb. The first scientific excavation in Scilly, that of Obadiah's Barrow on Gugh in 1901, showed that a tomb of this type, although not so massive an example as those on St. Mary's which have been mentioned, was first used for a burial or burials by inhumation. Later, but still in the Bronze Age, it was refashioned internally and was used for cremations for many more years. Traces of at least a dozen were found.

The excavation of Knackyboy Cairn, St. Martin's, in 1948 was remarkable for the recovery intact of the contents of about half of the burial chamber. The side walls were composed of quite small stones, built up in the manner of dry walling, but held together with a crude mortar, which seems also to have covered much of the face of the walls. It may well be that the whole of the walling was rendered with

a similar material. A binding substance of the same kind may be seen also in one of the tombs on St. Mary's and one on Samson. The chamber of Knackyboy Cairn yielded a prodigious quantity of Bronze Age pottery, 4 cwt. in total weight, which must represent the remains of over 70 vessels, each one of which once held the cremated remains of one person. Other finds, besides pieces of bronze, were nine beads, all but one of glass. The other bead of distinctive type, a six-pointed star, is of *faïence*. Similar beads have been found in Ulster and in Scotland, and there are parallels in Egypt. There is, therefore, evidence for trade or some other contact, either direct or through intermediaries, between Scilly and the civilization of the Near East in Bronze Age times.

In plan, Knackyboy Cairn is little different from one of the three principal tombs on St. Mary's, Innisidgen, which is of truly megalithic style; yet, whereas Innisidgen Cairn may well date from the early part of the second millennium B.C., the evidence of the finds at Knackyboy Cairn shows almost certainly that it was not built until near the end of that millennium (i.e. *c.* 1200 B.C.). Thereafter it must have remained in use for a very long time, perhaps five centuries, since the type of pottery found in its upper filling differs considerably from that found on the floor of the chamber. It is with evidence of this kind in mind that one should view the great number of Bronze Age tombs in Scilly. They then cease to become a problem.

Description of Three Burial Chambers

Bants Carn Burial Chamber

The mound, which is 40 feet or more in diameter, has both an outer and an inner retaining wall, but it is not known whether they are contemporary, or whether the outer wall was added to retain additional material, when the burial mound was enlarged. The entrance passage between the line of the two retaining walls is somewhat irregular and may well be a later construction than the main chamber.

The inner retaining wall, which is of good workmanship, ceases at the line of the passage against two portal stones, which each project from the line of the wall of the chamber, thereby restricting the actual entrance to 3 feet in width.

The chamber, originally covered by four capstones, one of which has been dislodged in recent times, has walls made mostly of large stones. Since, however, these stones do not reach up to the underside of the cap-stone, the deficiency has been made good by means of two or

three roughly laid courses of dry stone-work, which are corbelled out slightly, so that the chamber is narrower at the top than at floor level.

Four piles of cremated bones were found at the inner end of the chamber many years ago, as well as some pieces of pottery in the passage just outside the entrance to the chamber. One of these may be of Neolithic date, but others are of a kind which is now known to belong to an advanced stage of the Bronze Age. It is not possible from this evidence to be certain, but it is possible that the tomb was built c. 2000 B.C. or soon after, but remained in use for five hundred years or more. (Note: The adjacent ancient village is mentioned on page 10.)

Innisidgen Burial Chamber

This is contained within a mound only 26 feet in diameter. Unless, as is quite likely, the kerb was originally not visible, being erected only for structural reasons, to retain the mound, this was very small for the size of the chamber, which is the highest still extant in the islands. Its walls are composed mostly of large stones, and there are five cap-stones, shaped like bolsters, as is the manner of the Scilly tombs. There are no projecting stones at the entrance, but the chamber widens towards the middle, because one side wall is straight and the other convex. This feature is of frequent occurrence in the islands.

Nothing is known to have been found in the chamber, but its height and good workmanship suggest that it is one of the earlier of the tombs in the islands.

Porth Hellick Down Burial Chamber

This is one of a group of five chambered tombs, all very close together on Porth Hellick Down. The others are in a ruinous condition, but the tomb, which is in the Ministry's guardianship, is perhaps the best preserved of all those in the islands.

The circular mound is 40 feet in diameter and 5 feet high. The retaining wall which has been exposed by excavation, is of well-built dry walling, often two courses high. A passage, 3 feet wide and now unroofed, curves to the left, leading to a chamber, which is completely covered by four large cap-stones. Its walling is of large, upright stones, but the chamber is curiously irregular by the standards of Scilly tombs, whilst its entrance from the passage is restricted to 2 feet in width by a single, upright slab, set at right angles to the main wall. This feature occurs also in tombs in the Spanish Peninsula.

A few potsherds have been found in this tomb, but they seem to date

from the Late Bronze Age, and it is most unlikely in this case that they represent the remains of one of the original interments in the chamber.

The Early Iron Age

It is most improbable that there ever has been a time, at least since 2000 B.C., when the Scilly Isles ceased to be inhabited. Yet it is impossible to speak with much precision of the 1,500 years between the end of the Bronze Age and the time of King Athelstan, who died in A.D. 939. As already mentioned, homes of the Bronze Age are known to exist, but excavation has not yet proceeded far enough to enable archaeologists to deduce in detail the mode of life of the inhabitants of that time. One Bronze Age house on St. Martin's had low stone walls and a ridged roof, supported on slanting posts. The inhabitants used pottery vessels precisely similar to those used for cremations in the tombs of Scilly, and their diet included the usual food animals as well as limpets. Another house of the Bronze Age, at Perpitch on the same island, had a substantial high wall and a large, decorated, clay hearth.

For the inhabitants of the Early Iron Age there is so far still less evidence. One oval house of this period has been excavated at Par Beach, St. Martin's, below high-water mark. It was of more substantial construction than the nearby Bronze Age house, but apart from potsherds and flint implements no finds were made. There are, however, several earthworks, closely resembling others to be seen in Cornwall and elsewhere in Britain, where they have been ascertained to be of this time. They are the earliest defences known in the islands.

The best of these is Giants Castle, on the south-eastern point of St. Mary's. Here three curved lines of bank and ditch are to be seen running from cliff to cliff, to cut off a small promontory. This is, in fact, an example of the small camps on the edge of the sea, which in Cornwall are called Cliff Castles. Recently one of them, Maen Castle, Sennen, Cornwall, has been shown to date from an early stage of the Early Iron Age (c. 300 B.C.). During the war a few potsherds of Early Iron Age date were found in a cutting made by the Army at the outer edge of Giants Castle. These, with the type of camp, are sufficient to indicate in a general manner to which period it belongs, but it is not possible yet to say in which century it was constructed.

A similar, but larger, earthwork cuts off the promontory on which stands the *Old Blockhouse*, *Tresco*. The inner bank, which is within the area in the guardianship of the Ministry, is roughly semi-circular, but its ditch is no longer visible. A gap in its southern side indicates the

site of the original entrance. Two other banks may be traced lower down the slope, each with a gap for the entrance.

Burnt Hill, on the north coast of St. Martin's, has evidence of a stone rampart across its northern end, and there is a similar, but more massive, wall across the northern end of Bryher, north of Shipman Head Down.

Mount Todden Battery, whatever later use it may have served, is in origin a fortification of this time. Its rampart encloses a roughly circular area on the top of a hill, not on the edge of the sea. There is a gap in the rampart, one end of which is turned inwards in a manner which is very common in camps of the Early Iron Age.

In 1951 clearance of boulders beside a piece of walling on the shore of Little Arthur showed from pottery and other evidence that it belonged to a dwelling of the Early Iron Age.

The Roman Period

It is possible that Scilly is the same as the *Sylina Insula*, to which, according to the Roman writer Sulpicius Severus, the Priscillianist heretic, Instantius, was banished in A.D. 387. There is now no need to reject this identification because of the use of the singular, 'insula'. In 1948, on the shore of St. Martin's, there came to light part of a circular hut, which yielded Roman pottery of the third and fourth centuries A.D. and pieces of cassiterite or tin ore. The floor of this hut is now just covered by normal high tides. If one allows that in the fourth century it lay 20 feet or more above high-water mark, one is entitled to consider that the present St. Mary's, St. Martin's, Teän, St. Helen's, Tresco and Bryher at that time still formed part of one island. Similar evidence occurred at Old Man, an island off Teän, where a burial cist, containing two Roman bronze brooches of the mid-first century A.D., was found at about the same level. The discovery was due to the severance of this island into two portions, one of the more recent examples of the erosion of the coast.

Similar brooches, mostly of the first century A.D., were found in 1949 in a series of small oval cists encountered accidentally during the preparation of a housing site at Hughtown. The cists had contained crouched skeletons, and two yielded whole vessels of pottery. Second-century potsherds, including fragments of Samian ware, were also found in a house of native type at May's Hill, St. Martin's, along with masses of bones of animals, birds and fishes, the food of the inhabitants.

The *Ancient Village at Bants Carn* also dates from the middle of the Roman period (second to third centuries A.D.). It consists of round or

oval huts, of a diameter of about 25 feet, built of large, well-laid granite blocks. Paths and garden plots or small fields may also be detected, but much more excavation will be needed before the complete plan can be ascertained. So far one oval house has yielded potsherds of the period already stated. It had a well-constructed drain below its floor, and was probably roofed with a conical covering of reeds or heather thatch.

The only other objects of Roman date known in the islands are a small hoard of silver coins, of the Emperors Constantine II, Julian and Honorius, which was found on Samson, and must have been deposited about the year A.D. 400, and a Roman altar now in the 'Valhalla' at Tresco Abbey. This is of granite, and has no inscription, but has an axe carved on one side and a knife on the other. It was brought to Tresco in 1870 by Mr. Augustus Smith, and is said to have been found opposite the Atlantic Hotel in Hughtown.

The Dark Ages

This title is often given to the two centuries following the Roman withdrawal from Britain in A.D. 410 because of the scarcity of reliable evidence from written sources as to conditions in this country. Archaeological discoveries are gradually filling gaps in the knowledge of this period, but there is much which is still unknown.

For the history of Scilly at this time there is no written evidence, and the archaeological discoveries have been few, not only for these two hundred years but also for the four following centuries. Meagre as they are, however, they are sufficient to indicate once again that Scilly continued to be inhabited, and also to show that at least some of the inhabitants were by now converted to Christianity. It will be remembered that Christianity became a lawful religion in the Roman Empire in A.D. 313, and that, in spite of evidence of continued paganism later in the fourth century, by the following century there were sufficient Christians in Britain to produce a popular heresy, Pelagianism, which had to be resisted by the true Church.

There is at Tresco, built into the medieval abbey church, part of a stone, which has upon it an inscription reading '...THI FILI... COGVI'. Many such inscribed stones exist in Cornwall and Wales and other western parts of Britain. They are early Christian tombstones, and show in Latin that the body of someone, son of someone, lies buried close at hand. Nothing is known of the person thus commemorated at Tresco, nor can one say in full what was his name, because the stone has been broken, but the form of the letters, debased

Roman capitals, shows that the inscription was cut in the fifth or sixth century A.D.

Also in Tresco Abbey garden, but not accessible without written permission, are three early graves. All are about 9 inches high and 15 inches wide, with covers formed of several slabs of stone. The best preserved is now only 4 ft. long, but it may once have been longer. All face a little south of east, and near one of them was found a stone, about 6 inches in diameter, which had a simple cross cut on it. There is little doubt that these are Christian graves, and they resemble the so-called lintel graves of the Isle of Man, which are regarded as the remains of Christian cemeteries, dating from the centuries before the Norse invasions of the ninth and tenth centuries. If this identification of the Tresco graves is correct, they suggest that the monastery which is known from a document to have existed in Scilly in the eleventh century, had then already been established for several centuries, perhaps indeed from the time of the inscribed stone of the fifth or sixth century.

The island of St. Helen's, now uninhabited, was known at least in the later Middle Ages as St. Lide's Isle; there is no doubt that Lide is a contraction of Elidius. Unfortunately, little is known of St. Elidius. William of Worcester describes him as the son of a king, and quotes the Calendar of Tavistock Abbey as calling him a bishop, and as stating that either his body or his chapel, probably the former, lay in Scilly. It is, however, clear that in the Middle Ages his island, now St. Helen's, was a place of resort for pilgrims from other islands.

At the present time, amongst deep bracken and bramble on St. Helen's, there are to be seen the traces of a number of ruined buildings. One of these is a church, with nave, chancel and north aisle, parts of which were still standing to a considerable height in 1750, when they were described by Dr. Borlase. But there are also the remains of several primitive huts, one circular and the others rectangular, as well as massive enclosure walls. The church is of medieval date, but the huts have the appearance of a great antiquity, and it is probable that they are the remains, not necessarily all of one date, of an early Christian hermitage, perhaps an offshoot from Tresco. Whether any building is to be associated with St. Elidius himself it is impossible to say, but the site is typical of the remote spots, like the islands off the west coast of Ireland, which were selected by early Christian hermits. However, a further examination of the site revealed a small rectangular Oratory in addition to the Church. The Oratory was constructed in a primitive manner with massive granite blocks; an altar at the east end and stone seating around the interior still remained. The presence, thus, of an

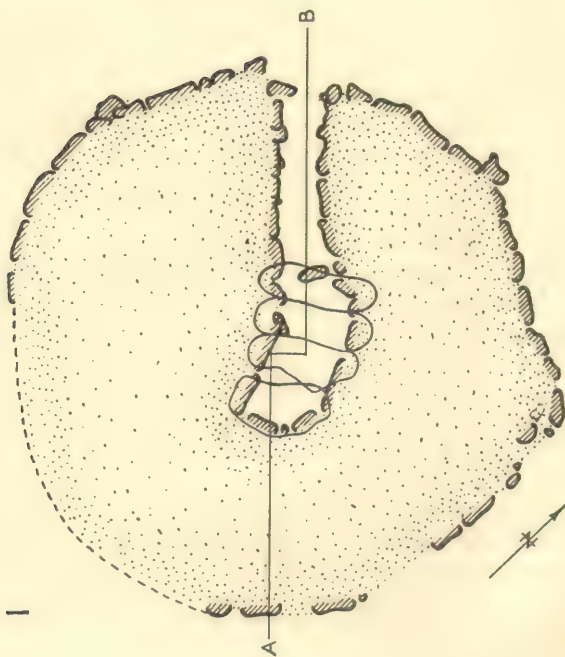
Oratory and a Church may well be explained by the necessity of erecting the Church at a later date to house the revered remains of the Saint when the island became a place of pilgrimage.

Late in the tenth century the Scilly Isles appear to have witnessed a most historic occasion, and it is perhaps significant that the reference is to a Christian act. The *Orkneyinga Saga* records under the years A.D. 989-995: 'When he came from Wendland, Olaf Tryggvi's son spent four years a-harrying in the British Isles (989-993) before he had himself baptized in the Scilly Isles. From there he sailed to England where he married Gyda, sister of Kvaran, King of Ireland. After that he stayed for a time in Dublin, until Earl Hakon sent Thorir Hook-fist to the west to lure him thence. Olaf sailed from the west with five ships and came first to the Orkneys. There he came upon Earl Sigurd in Osmundwall in South Ronaldsay with three ships, ready to go on a war-cruise. Olaf invited the Earl on to his ship, and said that he wished to talk with him. And when they met, Olaf spoke to him as follows: "It is my will that thou have thyself baptized and all those under thee, else thou shalt die on the spot and I shall bear fire and flame through all the isles."

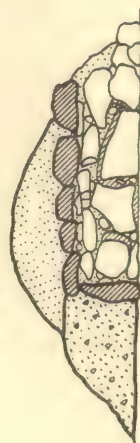
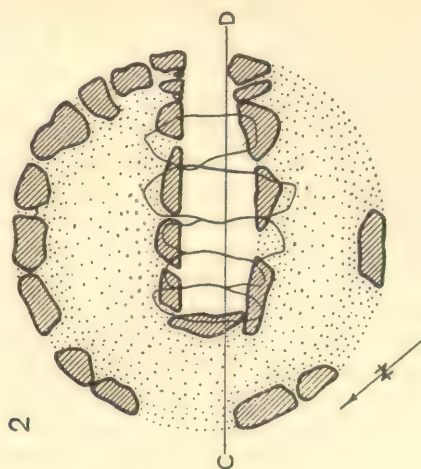
'When the Earl found himself in this dilemma, he left his decision entirely in Olaf's hands. He had him baptized and took as a hostage his son, who was called Hundi or Hvelp, but the King had him baptized by the name of Hlodver. Then all the Orkneys became Christian. But Olaf sailed east to Norway, and Hlodver sailed with him.' The conversion of Norway to Christianity followed.

It will be noted that the Saga does not say that Scilly was Olaf's base during his three years' harrying of the British Isles, nor that he was converted to Christianity in the islands, but both are likely to have been facts. Indeed, another Saga states that in Scilly Olaf met a man who correctly foretold the future, including the fact that he would be baptized. It also says that he remained in Scilly a long time, and 'got with him priests and other learned men'. In any case, the record of the *Orkneyinga Saga* serves to illustrate conditions of life at that time, the fury of the Viking raids, the power of the holy men, and the product of these two, militant Christianity.

So far, nothing has been found in Scilly which may be directly attributed to these Vikings, but, since their burials are commonly found upon the sea-coast, subsequent erosion by the sea may already have destroyed any remains, which would have illustrated their sojourn in the islands. It is hardly likely that Olaf and his followers were the first or the last band who touched the islands, and their predecessors, being pagans, would have more to show in their burials than any who died during Olaf's stay.



SECTION ON LINE A-B



SECTION ON LINE C-D



Gibson, Scilly

Bants Cam Burial Chamber, St. Mary's



Gibson, Scilly

Innisidgen Burial Chamber, St. Mary's

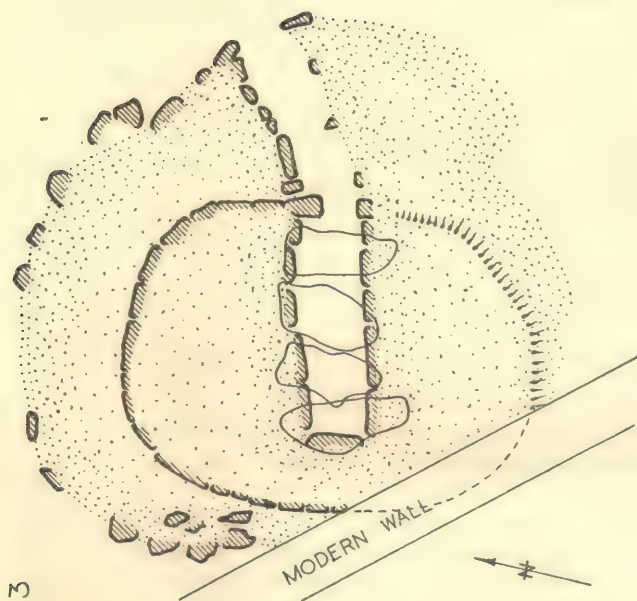


Gibson. Sully

Porth Hellick Down Burial Chamber, St. Mary's

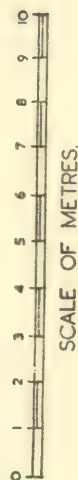
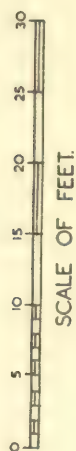
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BURIAL CHAMBERS

1. PORTH HELICK DOWN
2. INNISIDGEN
3. BANTS CARN



There are, however, a few potsherds of distinctive character, which have been found with bones and other rubbish on the shore of Teän. The surface of this pottery has upon it the marks of blades of grass. Such pottery has been found in Cornwall and elsewhere at sites of this period, and the kitchen-midden on Teän undoubtedly indicates the proximity of a dwelling of this time, but whether of Vikings or natives cannot be determined with certainty.

The Middle Ages

The history of the islands during the early Middle Ages is almost as obscure as that of the preceding centuries. It seems that most have remained the property of the King of England, perhaps from the time of King Athelstan, even until the present day. There have been variously, tenants-in-chief, governors or leaseholders, but the land has never been granted outright to a subject. They now form part of the Royal Duchy of Cornwall. Side by side with this royal jurisdiction there was for five or six centuries that of the monks of Tresco. The possible origins of this monastery have already been mentioned, but it seems that by the time of King Edward the Confessor, if not before, it was a possession of the Abbey of Tavistock in Devon. Henry I mentions this in a charter, when he confirms that Abbey in its possession of the churches of Scilly with their appurtenances and land.

From the time of the Norman Conquest of England in A.D. 1066 it was usual for the King, his officers and his tenants, to erect as the seat of their authority a castle or castles on their estates. During the first century of Norman rule these castles were usually of earth and timber, often flat-topped, conical mounds of earth, called mottes, which had on their summit a palisade and a wooden tower or other building. A ditch surrounded the mound, and beyond lay one or more court-yards or baileys, also protected by bank, palisade and ditch. In rocky districts a boss of rock, partly fashioned to a suitable shape, often served instead of a mound of earth.

It is natural to expect to find an early castle of this kind in Scilly, but none is certainly visible. Dr. Borlase, writing in 1750, does, however, mention a round hillock which 'seems to have had a Keep on the top of it' just below Garrison towards Hughtown, and in this position a drawing of the seventeenth century shows an outlying boss of rock or earth, which was then used as an outwork in the fortifications. Dr. Borlase calls it Mount Holles. To this day there is a rocky knoll astride the road which curves up from Hughtown to Garrison, but it is now much overgrown and altered in shape. It is by no means unlikely that this is the site of the first castle in Scilly.

At Old Town, St. Mary's, there are a few remains of the walling of a castle of thirteenth or fourteenth century type, which is now called Old Castle, but which in medieval times was styled the Castle of Ennor. In 1306 it was held by Ranulph de Blankminster in return for his finding and maintaining 12 men-at-arms for keeping the peace in those parts. He seems to have been tenant-in-chief of the islands, paying annually to the King 300 puffins or 6s. 8d. In any case, it seems clear that by about A.D. 1300 Ennor Castle was the chief secular residence of the isles, and the constable thereof was the chief secular authority. It had, in fact, given its name to the island, since the actual style in the document in question is the 'castle in the isle of Ennor', unless, as is quite likely, that was then the old name of the island, which later became St. Mary's.

Of the medieval monastery of Tresco there are some remains in the garden of the present Tresco Abbey, the residence of Lt.-Com. T. Dorrien-Smith. The outline of nave and chancel may be traced, although much of the present visible walling is due to modern rebuilding. In the south wall there are two fine arches, perhaps partly rebuilt, which seem to have led, respectively, east to the south transept of the church, and west into the north walk of the cloister. Elsewhere in the garden, built into a wall, is part of an early font, decorated with round-arched arcading.

There is one reference to the monks of Tresco, which is of significance. Again it comes from the *Orkneyinga Saga*, this time relating events of 1141: 'Sweyn [Asleif's Son] none the less set sail, and he had at this time three ships; and they got little booty in the earlier part of the summer. But after a time they sailed south round the coasts of Ireland and there they seized a merchant ship belonging to monks from the Scilly Isles and plundered it.' Again, in 1155, it is written: 'A little later the three chiefs, Sweyn, Thorbjorn [and] Eric, resolved to go a-harrying. They sailed first to the Hebrides [and] then west to the Scilly Isles, and there won a great victory at Port Saint Mary on Columba's Mass [June 9th] and took immense plunder. After that they returned to the Orkneys [the very best of friends].'

The first reference shows, and the second tends to confirm, that the Tresco monks were engaged upon somewhat extensive trade. There is no means of knowing what, if any, were their exports, but it should always be remembered that St. Helen's Pool, lying between Tresco and the offshoot of the monastery on St. Helen's, was the chief harbour in Scilly in medieval times. The monks may, therefore, have derived considerable profit from the collection of tolls for anchorage in that Pool. It is possible that the centre of the islands in medieval times lay in these northern islands rather than in St. Mary's, and it may well have

been the monks rather than the King who possessed real power in Scilly.

The Sixteenth Century

The disappearance of the monastery at the Dissolution must have affected the lives of the inhabitants of the islands, not only in some cases by changing their masters, but also to a certain extent by depriving them of employment or of an outlet for their produce. But it so happened that the Reformation in England, in particular the breach with Rome, led indirectly to another form of employment and prosperity.

The Pope was constantly striving to reassert his authority in England, but was as often thwarted by the inability of the Emperor, Charles V, and the King of France, Francis I, to compose their differences. But by 1538 the Pope had succeeded in making peace between these two, and there was a very real danger of the invasion of England from France and the Low Countries, which were part of the Emperor's domain. The English King, Henry VIII, defended the south-eastern and southern coasts with many new castles, forts and blockhouses, spending upon them some of the revenues and materials of the suppressed monasteries.

King Charles Castle, Tresco, seems to be a product of this time, and the islanders may well have profited from its erection, both in their labour upon it and the supply of provisions for the garrison. The site has now been cleared of debris which had accumulated as a result either of natural decay or of deliberate dismantling at the time of the Civil War in the seventeenth century. It seems to have been a two-storeyed, oblong, stone building with a semi-hexagonal western end and an entrance at the east. The door-way still retains its four-centred head, and at the western end there is one intact gun-port. Others are partially preserved, and their remains lie on the ground below. These gun-ports resemble those of the Tower of Belem at Lisbon (1515-21), but the shape of the structure is closely akin to that of certain blockhouses at Plymouth, notably one at Firestone Bay, Stonehouse, which were certainly in existence in 1540, and probably date from c. 1535.

[For the later part of *King Charles Castle*, see page 22.]

Henry VIII died in 1547 and was succeeded by his son, Edward VI, who was a minor. As usual on such occasions, there was contention amongst powerful nobles for ascendancy over the young King, and also some lawlessness in outlying parts of the country. The brother of the Lord Protector Somerset, Lord Seymour of Sudeley, who was

Lord Admiral, was accused of plotting against the King, and one of the counts against him was that he was using the Scilly Isles as a base for acts of piracy, much as the Vikings had done five-and-a-half centuries earlier. This was in 1549; it may well have been that he was tenant-in-chief of the islands from the King.

After the disappearance from the scene of Lord Admiral Seymour, the King spent a great sum of money upon the defence of the islands. In 1579 it was stated that Edward VI built two blockhouses in St. Mary's Isle and began a fort and a house and two blockhouses on Tresco; their charge, with that of the garrison, cost £6,000. Certainly work was proceeding in 1551. From this time onwards until the ascendancy of the British Navy in the early nineteenth century, the history of Scilly was closely bound up with that of the defence of the realm, particularly as it was so useful a base and haven for an expanding empire.

The year 1549 saw the beginning of the connection of the Godolphin family with Scilly, which persisted with scarcely an interruption for 282 years. In that year a Mr. Godolphin was Captain of the island. Then, in 1570, Queen Elizabeth leased the islands to Francis Godolphin for a term of 38 years in return for a rent which in 1579 was £20 a year. Maritime expansion of England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth was such as to bring her into competition with Spain, who considered it her right to derive great profit from the New World. In this way enmity with Spain amongst the English gradually replaced their traditional enmity with France. It must be allowed that the Spanish King, Philip II, was slow to take direct action against the English who often did injury to him and his subjects, but in 1588 the great Armada was despatched, to enable the troops waiting in the Low Countries to effect the conquest of England. Its fate is well known, but it is not so often realized that the English, although apparently improvising their defences at the last moment, had in fact been making their dispositions to meet such a threat for several years.

Although the Spanish Armada was defeated and dispersed, war with Spain continued. Indeed, it was but the beginning of 16 years of intermittent warfare. For the first few years of this period there was little real fear of invasion, but from then onwards it was an ever-present menace, which caused the Queen and her counsellors to look to the defence of the realm. Many new fortifications were built, and, in view of the vulnerable position of Scilly and its value as a haven in any war with an Atlantic power, it is not surprising to find that it was amongst the places which received attention.

The chief of the new fortifications is Star Castle, which, as the date-stone above its doorway states, was built in 1593. It is a peculiar building

for its period, since in all aspects, except its angularity, it resembles the castles built 50 years earlier. The central building, shaped like an eight-pointed star, has a basement for storage and two floors above for accommodation of the garrison. The inner ends of the joists of the first floor rest upon a central pillar of masonry in which were the fire-places; two of these remain on the ground floor, in the present lounge and kitchen. The original stair may have ascended between two parts of this central pillar, but, if so, it was removed when the present stair was made after the Restoration. No original windows remain in the castle, although some date from the same time as the stair. A narrow pathway divides this building from a thick curtain wall, which is now called the Ramparts. This also is eight-pointed and has an external batter, whilst beyond is a rock-cut ditch. At each re-entrant angle there was once a gunport, but these have been blocked with masonry. The bell-cote is an eighteenth-century addition, but, close to it, the elaborate arrangements for defence of the gateway, including a portcullis, are of considerable interest. Star Castle is now an hotel.

The Old Blockhouse, Tresco, also seems to date from this time. It consists of a rectangular platform, now paved with stone. It once had a parapet, which at least at the western ends of the northern and southern sides contained gun-ports. The western or landward wall was probably higher than the others, and contained the door-way. The small building south of the doorway, which has been used as a dwelling, is of later date, but this fortification, like Star Castle, continued in use for two hundred years or more.

Harry's Walls, St. Mary's, exhibits an example of wrongful, popular attribution of origin, if by Harry one is intended to understand Henry VIII. Fortifications of the kind here exhibited were not known in England until after his death, and it so happens that the date of the fort is known from documentary sources. It was built at the same time as Star Castle, and for a complementary reason, so that between them they might protect and command the new harbour, St. Mary's Pool. The pier was begun in 1601, and from this time dates the pre-eminence of St. Mary's and Hughtown as the centre of the islands.

In the State Papers of 1593 there are references to a fort and two blockhouses being built in Scilly, which were then well on the way to being finished except for timber work. South Wales was stated to be the best place from which to draw supplies of timber. At Hatfield House there is a plan (here reproduced by courtesy of the Marquess of Salisbury) which has on it a legend: 'This fortresse begonne in oure ladies Ilande for the defence of the whole Isles, and not finished, the timberwork for the same already framid to the setting up, with a

brewhouse and a milne lying in South Wales, redy to be conveyed to the saide Isles, when order may be gyven as touching the same.' The plan shows a square fort with an acutely pointed bastion at each corner, having in each flank two casemates or openings for guns. There are internal buildings against the curtain on all four sides, and dimensions, set out in detail, give an overall measurement of the square as 130 feet.

The remains at Harry's Walls, insofar as they are preserved, agree precisely with this plan. There is one length of stone curtain, the south-western, flanked by the greater part of two bastions which have in their flanks large recesses, such as usually contain casemates for guns. There are traces of the internal buildings, parallel with this curtain, and the ditch which once ran in front of the north-western curtain is also visible, along with slight traces of the curtain itself. The dimensions agree with those of the fort in the Hatfield House plan, and there can be no doubt that it is Harry's Walls which is there depicted. It is possible that the fort was never finished, since there seems to be no later references to it in documents after 1593, but the letter of that year, which has been quoted, implies completion of the masonry and the present condition of the fort is probably due to natural decay.

With the completion of these four castles and blockhouses, King Charles Castle commanding the approach to New Grimsby, the old blockhouse overlooking the landing place on the eastern side of Tresco, and both Star Castle and Harry's Walls protecting the new harbour at St. Mary's, reasonable precautions might seem to have been taken. But soon after the erection of Star Castle a beginning was made with fortification of the whole headland, the Hugh, on which Star Castle stands. A curtain wall with bastions was built from sea to sea across the neck of land, by which it is joined to the rest of the island. Much of this is still visible; its masonry resembles that of Star Castle, but is less massive. The curtain itself from the north-eastern angle of Garrison southwards as far as the Sally-Port is all in this style, but all the bastions now visible have been rebuilt, like the main gateway, except the bastion at the Sally-Port and the detached bastion east of it by the edge of the sea. This is the defence which is shown in a drawing of 1639.

The earliest houses in Hughtown probably also date from this time, and the garden walls of some of those nearest to the pier still retain in their shape and ornaments certain characteristics of the period.

The Civil War

The Isles of Scilly remained staunchly Royalist throughout the Civil War, but they can have been only a slight embarrassment to Parliament so long as the latter held complete command of the Navy. In due course, however, much of the Navy revolted against Parliament, and was organized by Prince Rupert in the Royalist interest at foreign ports. Outlying islands, like Scilly, then became thorns in Parliament's side, since they could, and did, form bases for raids upon shipping.

It was not, however, until 1651 that attention could be given to the reduction of such island bases; in that year all of them fell, Man, Scilly and the Channel Islands. The expedition to Scilly was hastened by the presence of a Dutch fleet under Tromp, whose intentions were regarded suspiciously by the Parliament in London. He had indeed summoned the Royalist governor, Sir John Grenville, to surrender, but the latter had refused, suspecting that if he did Scilly might become Dutch rather than Parliamentary.

In due course Blake, the Admiral of the Parliamentary fleet, was dispatched to complete the business, which he did with quickness and tact. His conduct of operations was worthy of a man who ranks with Drake and Nelson as champion of British seapower, whilst only by tactful handling was Tromp diverted from an interference which could have been most troublesome to England.

Blake did not make a direct attack on St. Mary's, which was the chief seat of Royalist power. He anchored in St. Helen's Pool. After a false start, when his advance party was landed upon Norwethel, either by accident or by the design of a local pilot, he fought his way on to Tresco. He then erected a platform for guns upon the southern point of Tresco, whence he could command St. Mary's harbour. Soon afterwards the Royalists capitulated without risking the result of a Parliamentary landing on St. Mary's.

The progress of this short campaign can still be clearly followed on the ground. The Royalists had employed the time of their long isolation in perfecting the fortification of the islands. The approach to St. Mary's Pool, both by Crow Sound and by St. Mary's Sound, was commanded by batteries. On Toll's Island, Pellew's Redoubt is a battery for a few guns, which consists of two half-bastions, placed back to back. Above Bar Point there is a most massive battery, made mostly of sand and now rather shapeless. Between these two are other batteries, which are marked on large-scale maps. At Carn Morval Point there is a small battery from which guns could fire either north-west or south-west. There is a similar earthwork on Peninnis Head, and it is probable that a continuous breastwork was built round the Garrison on the line

of the present stone wall. Some earlier work, perhaps of Civil War date and not rebuilt in stonework later, is still to be seen along the north-western side of Garrison. A similar continuous breastwork may also be seen between the batteries along the north-eastern coast of St. Mary's between Toll's Island and Bar Point.

Tresco already had King Charles Castle and the Old Blockhouse, to defend New and Old Grimsby respectively, whilst a battery on Bryher faced southwards. At the same time a pentagonal, bastioned fort was added to the earlier stone castle at *King Charles Castle*. This is a well-planned fort, typical of the Royalist works of the period. There is a ditch beyond the curtain and bastions, and the flanks of the latter were probably at right angles to the curtain. At the southern tip of Tresco another such fort was made, which could assist in commanding the approach to St. Mary's Pool, and also prevent a landing on this part of Tresco. This is now only partly traceable; portions of three sides of what was apparently a large pentagonal fort may be seen surrounding, and lower than, Oliver's Battery at Crow Point.

Nowhere in Britain can the disposition of fortifications in the Civil War and their influence upon a campaign be studied better than in Scilly. It is clear that Blake anchored in St. Helen's Pool, because he could reach it from the north, whereas he dared not risk sailing through Crow Sound or St. Mary's Sound because of the Royalist fortifications, and was prevented from entering New Grimsby by Royalist batteries and ships. So far as is known, the only fortification on the eastern side of Tresco was the Old Blockhouse. Here it was that Blake attacked and succeeded in the engagement, which decided the fate of the Royalists in Scilly. He was, of course, aware of the dispositions of the defenders and laid his plans accordingly.

The fort made by Blake, from which to bombard St. Mary's Pool at long range, is that which is called Oliver's Battery at Crow Point. It is a small, pentagonal work on the top of a rocky knoll, and has a low breastwork and small bastions. Its character shows that, unlike its Royalist predecessor, which is lower down the knoll and larger and was clearly intended for guns to fire to west, north-west and north-east, its business lay due south and south-east.

After the capture of Scilly some at least of its fortifications were maintained, whilst a new building was erected in 1651/2, which has come to be called *Cromwell's Castle* in honour of Oliver Cromwell.

The castle is a tall, round tower, built of massive rubble, in a style typical of the 16th or 17th century, as may be seen also in the outer walling of Star Castle. The original entrance was through a door-way high up on the south side. This had outside it a small platform, perhaps of wood and movable, resting upon projecting corbels, which are still

visible. There are no indications lower down of any supports of a wooden staircase to this door-way, but an old drawing shows one curving up the western side of the tower.

From this doorway a stair led down inside the tower to the first floor, which was the living-room of the castle. Below was an unlighted basement. The principal room is now covered by a fine ribbed stone vault. Midway between floor and vault there is a massive beam, which indicates that there was an intermediate floor, but it is uncertain whether or not this was an original feature. If it was not, then the stair to the top of the tower must always have been approached by means of a wooden stair, but by a shorter one than that now in use.

This stair in the wall leads to a platform, over the stone vault, which is open to the sky. In the wall of the tower, which is very thick, there are six gun-ports, which have more external splay than internal, a feature of defence in the middle of the seventeenth century. A short stair leads from the platform to the wall-head, but the parapet is now missing.

At first sight it seems surprising that these two fortifications, King Charles Castle and Cromwell's Castle, should have been erected so close to one another for the same purpose, defence of the haven of New Grimsby. It seems, however, that King Charles Castle, the earlier of the two, was badly sited for the purpose. Certainly it could hardly be said to have commanded the actual haven without an undue depression of the guns. For this purpose Cromwell's Castle was much more suitable, and no doubt its height, which is unusual in this period, is due to a desire to gain command for the guns.

Early in the 18th century the present platform was added to seaward of the round tower. The old method of entry was given up in favour of one from the platform through a doorway cut in the wall of the tower. A stone pillar was placed in the middle of the stair from the old doorway to the first floor of the tower.

Later History

At the Restoration in 1660 Scilly came again to the Godolphin family, and remained so until 1831, when the Duke of Leeds refused to renew the lease from the Crown. Members of the family seldom visited the islands, which were administered by agents, and the inhabitants, having profited for perhaps a thousand years from the presence in their midst, first of monks and later of considerable garrisons, now began to know poverty.

For a short time, however, the fortifications were maintained; they were even enlarged. It is perhaps no coincidence that the Royalist Commander, who held out in Scilly until 1651, Sir John Grenville, became later the first Earl of Bath, who was responsible for the building of Plymouth Citadel (1666-70). This lies on Plymouth Hoe, whilst on St. Mary's, Scilly, the Hoe or Hugh, from which Hughtown takes its name, and which is now called Garrison, at this time was first girt almost entirely with a stone defence. Its style is a fairly well squared and coursed rubble which may be seen inserted into earlier, uncoursed masonry beside the gateway into Garrison. The gateway itself is of this date, but not the masonry above it and the bell-cote, which, as the date-stone shows, were put up in 1742. The bastions on the east curtain north of the Sally-Port, the remainder of the east curtain, i.e. south of the Sally-Port, the Morning Point Bastion and the salients on the south curtain, as well as the southernmost length of the west curtain, are all in this style. There are contemporary gun-embrasures in the east and south curtains, although in the former they have been blocked with later masonry.

This later work, which from the date-stone over the gateway may be attributed to 1742, is of very finely squared and coursed rubble masonry. Apart from the final work at the gateway, which has been mentioned, and the blocking of earlier embrasures, this work may be seen in Woolpack Point Bastion. It is clear that this bastion is an addition to an earlier curtain and that the doorway to it, which resembles in appearance the rearward part of the main gateway into Garrison, is an insertion into that curtain. The postern immediately north-west of this bastion is not an insertion of this period, but, except for the first stretch of curtain, the wall up to Steval Point seems to date from this time. A slight addition seems to have been made at the northern end of the east curtain, but the fortification was left incomplete, and still remains so, along the north-western side of Garrison.

Fortification was not the only building work undertaken in the later seventeenth century. The north aisle of the old church on St. Mary's was added in 1662, and the south aisle was begun in 1677. In Dr. Borlase's time (1750) there was a gallery for soldiers in the church and a seat below for the commanding officer. There were also disjointed parts of a monument to the wife of Joseph Hunkin, governor of Scilly for Parliament in 1657.

In 1680 the lighthouse on Agnes was built. The light was then supplied by a coal-fire which burnt in a large iron grate upon a platform of brick on the floor of the lantern at the top of the building. Ingenious arrangements were made for the escape of smoke, and for the discharge

of cinders. The building was plastered white, so that it served also as a daymark; it was built by Trinity House, and was superseded in 1910 by the Peninnis Lighthouse. It is now used only as a seamark.

The daymark on St. Martin's, which still serves its purpose, is also a product of this time. It was erected in 1683 by Mr. Thomas Ekins, who was the first steward of the Godolphins to reside in the islands. The inscription upon it has recently been remade with a wrong date (1637).

This same Mr. Ekins was one of those responsible for introducing into the islands the industry of kelping. Kelp is an alkali, which was of value to glass-makers, soap-makers and bleachers. It was obtained by burning sea-weed or ore-weed, as it was called in Scilly, and the process has been described in detail in Quiller-Couch's *Major Vigoureux*, and in Mothersole's *The Isles of Scilly*. For 150 years kelping was one of the chief employments of the islanders. It had several disadvantages, not least the smoke made during the burning—'a heavy stinking vapour', Dr. Borlase calls it—and, owing to the middleman, profits were small, but these were hard times in Scilly, and any profit was better than none. After being dried, the weed was piled between layers of brushwood in shallow pits. Many of these pits may still be seen. They are about 6 feet in diameter and 2 feet deep with sloping sides, which are lined with flat stones; they were naturally placed close to the water's edge.

Shipbuilding and piloting were also means of profit in the eighteenth century, but they seem not to have been consistent means of livelihood for many of the islanders. In 1819 there was distress in Scilly, and £13,000 was collected to alleviate it by people on the mainland, who sought to start a mackerel and pilchard fishery. Fish cellars were built on Tresco, and boats and nets were provided, but there was little success. At about the same time surplus produce, chiefly potatoes, was exported to the Mediterranean in ships built in Scilly, but before long the Scilly Islanders were swept off this market by the Channel Islanders.

This was the position in 1835, when Mr. Augustus Smith leased all the islands from the Crown and came to reside in Scilly. With his encouragement, shipbuilding revived as an industry, and continued to flourish until the age of steam, whilst in 1850 there were 15 good pilot boats in the islands. Piloting used to occupy the men of St. Martin's and Agnes to a considerable extent, and there are still at Higher Town and Lower Town, St. Martin's, rows of sheds, where the pilot boats were kept.

Finally, there came the flower-growing industry, now nearly a century old. Starting in a small way, with encouragement and material help from Mr. Augustus Smith, it has become the staple industry of the islands. In 1850 it was said that 'floriculture may be carried to any

extent, if only the hurtful effects of storm and wind can be prevented by seasonable shelter'. The present typical appearance of the islands, with long, narrow fields, divided by evergreen hedges, is at once a measure of the success obtained against the prevailing winds and of the present prosperity of these Fortunate Isles.

The plans of the burial chambers are based on those in H. O'Neill Hencken's The Archaeology of Cornwall and Scilly (Methuen, 1932) by permission of the author and publishers.

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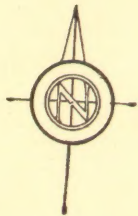
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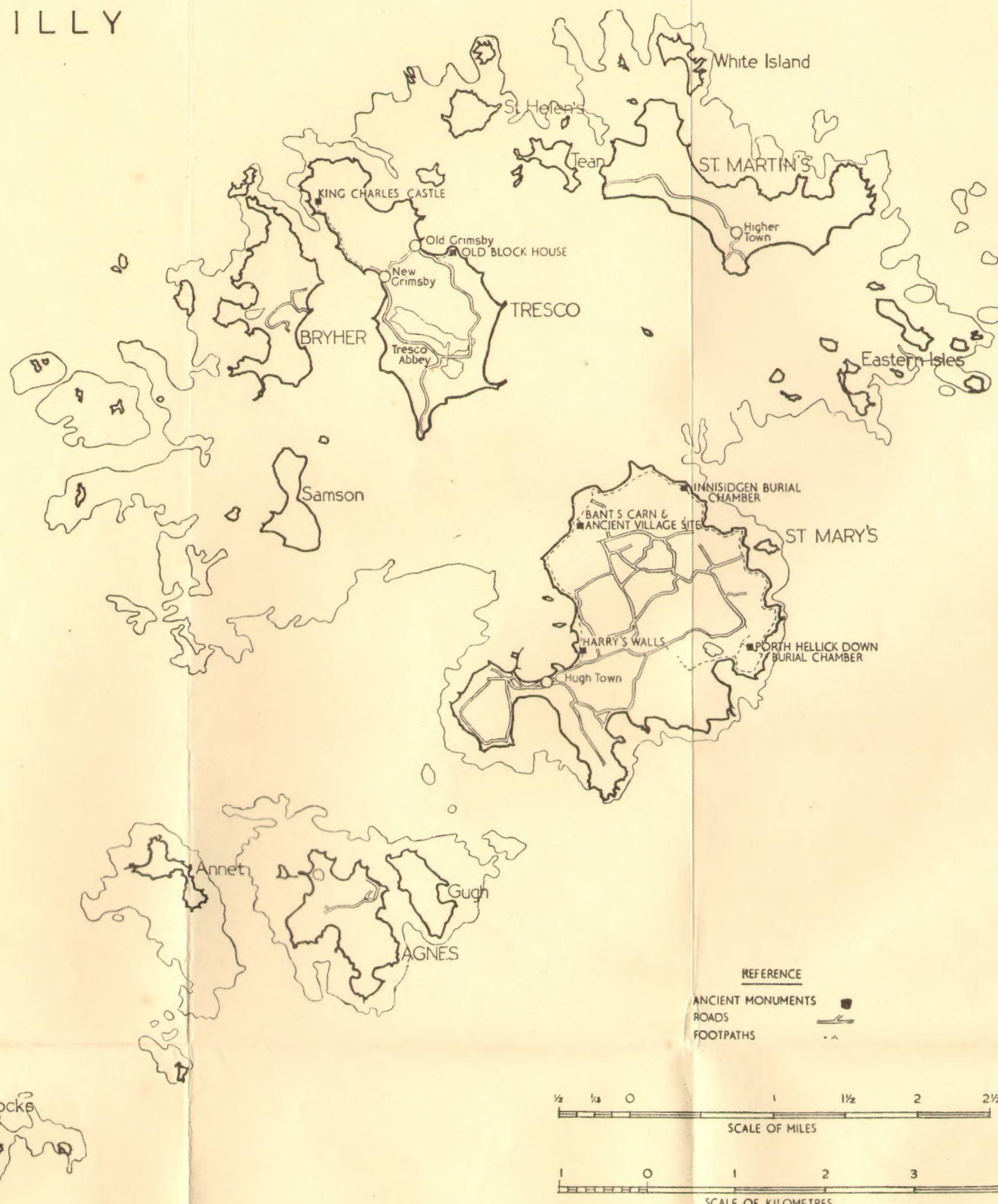
ADDENDA

Cromwell's Castle, due south of King Charles Castle.

Lower Innisidgen Burial Chamber, W.N.W. of Innisidgen Burial Chamber.

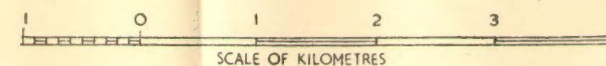
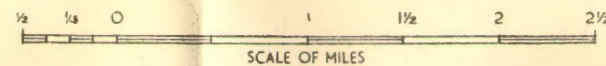
NOTE

The marine contour is at the 5 fathom line (see page 4)



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